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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASUNCION 001035

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: **AMED**

SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE FOR RMO LAWRENCE GERNON

REF: LA PAZ 002479

¶1. Per reftel, country clearance is granted for RMO Dr. Lawrence Gernon, for travel to Asuncion during the period of August 21-24, 2005 for the purpose of providing support to Post. The contact officer for the visit is Maria Fernandez, Office tel.: (595)(21) 213-715, Ext 2025. Home tel.: (595)(21) 296-212. Cellular tel. Number: (595) 0971-204-**1333.**

¶2. Hotel reservations have been confirmed at the Sheraton Hotel, Avda. Aviadores del Chaco #2066; telephone: (595)(21) 617-7000, Fax: (595)(21) 617-7001. This hotel is located approximately eight miles from the Embassy. Cost of the single/double room is USD 100.00 per night with breakfast included.

¶3. Maria Fernandez will meet Dr. Gernon at airport.

¶4. All U.S. citizens traveling to Paraguay are now required to have visas. Airport and border visas are not available at this time. Please contact the Paraguayan Embassy or closest Consulate for more information, especially if you require a multiple entry visa.

¶5. If travel plans involve visiting neighboring countries in the region, please arrive with appropriate visas and obtain country clearances from the appropriate U.S. Embassies. Brazil and Argentina requires visas for official travelers on diplomatic, official, and/or personal passports. Official visitors contemplating travel to Iguazu Falls should advise the Embassy before doing so as well as Embassy Brasilia and/or Embassy Buenos Aires if they plan to cross into Brazil and Argentina. Travelers are reminded that Iguazu Falls is located on the border of Brazil and Argentina, about ten miles east of Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, and that travelers from Paraguay cross into Brazil.

¶6. Post recommends that even though you will be only transiting Brazil, you also obtain a Brazilian visa. If the airline cancels or delays its flight to Asuncion, then you may have to stay in Sao Paulo for one day while waiting for the next available flight to Asuncion. Brazilian authorities will not permit you to leave the airport to go to a hotel without a valid Brazilian visa. U.S. citizens may be fingerprinted and photographed upon entry into Brazil. This applies to holders of diplomatic and official passports, as well as tourist passports.

¶7. Threat Assessment:

¶A. Political Violence-Terrorism: There are no indigenous terrorist organizations in Paraguay. There are no political groups or parties that are currently active in this country that are specifically targeting U.S. interests. However, given the presence of members of and support for extremist terrorist groups in the tri-border region (Alto Parana and Itapua Departments), visitors here cannot discount the possibility of terrorist activity, to include random acts of anti-American violence.

¶B. Crime: Paraguay is a high-threat post for crime. Petty street crime in the city of Asuncion and the immediate suburbs continues to be a problem for residents and visitors alike. Visitors to the city of Asuncion should be aware of problems with pickpockets or purse snatchers on the street or on public transportation. Until recently, most crime affecting visitors has been non-violent; aggravated robberies, shootings, etc., while not completely unheard of in Asuncion, were nonetheless uncommon. However, incidents of armed robberies of businesses and residences by criminal groups are occurring with greater frequency, and as a result, it is recommended that due caution be exercised when traveling about the city.

¶8. The seasons in Paraguay are the opposite of those in the United States. Asuncion's climate is extremely hot from November through April and cool or mild in July and August. The transitional seasons, May - June and September - October are unpredictable: they can be

pleasant or hot. Health conditions generally are good. The water in Asuncion is potable, and there are few reports of intestinal or stomach problems. There is no endemic hepatitis or malaria in Asuncion although outbreaks of dengue fever are recurrent.

19. As of 08/16/05 the exchange rate is 5,970 guaranies to one US dollar. Personal Finances: Official travelers may cash personal checks at the embassy for amounts up to US\$ 750.00 per week; and use their ATM cards at one of the many terminals located throughout the city. Because of restrictions with the embassy bank, Citibank, traveler's checks may only be cashed with one of the local exchange houses.

10. Laptops, Personal Digital assistants (PDA) Pilots, cellular telephones and other electronic devices: Laptops and PDAs may not be brought into the Embassy without the prior approval of the Regional Security Office. Personally owned laptops,PDAs may not/not be used in the Embassy. USG-owned laptops may only be used in Controlled Access Areas (CAA) if the user certifies that the computer has been continuously under the personal control of a cleared American throughout transit. If this requirement is not met, the laptop can only be utilized outside of the CAA. USG-owned PDAs are under the same restrictions as cellular phones and other electronic devices, and may not be utilized within the CAA.

11. Security Clearance: State Department policy requires that all official visitors verify their security clearances, in writing, with the RSO in order to have unescorted access to the Embassy. Visitors whose clearances are not verified must be escorted at all times. TDY'ers must schedule a security in briefing with the security office as soon as possible after arriving at post. Access badges will not be issued until the employee has acknowledged receipt of the required security briefing.

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